

## ***READY for SCHOOL* Tips for Staff: Learning Academics through the Arts**

It is not unusual to see news stories about how time for music and visual arts in schools is being cut to allow for more time for academics. While we all appreciate the importance of academics, there are many, many ways to effectively build academic skills through the arts. A few ideas follow:

### **Music:**

- Helping children understand patterns is an important pre-math skill. Try demonstrating a short pattern for children to listen to and then have them repeat it. You can start simple (such as clap your hands, then tap your knees) and get more complicated (two claps, one head pat and one foot stomp).
- Rhythm instruments have a long history in early childhood programs. Tapping a regular rhythm on a drum or triangle or shaking bells to singing or a recording helps children strengthen their listening skills which are so key for performing well in school.
- Many popular children’s songs and finger plays (such as “Five little monkeys jumping on the bed”) have number teaching embedded in the song. This song subtly teaches the concept that as a monkey falls off the bed, you have fewer monkeys. It is a fun way to help children experience the concept of subtraction.
- A visual representation of the words to a song helps children as they move towards reading. Using the last example, write the words to the “5 Little Monkeys” on chart paper for children to see, but insert pictures as well as words. For example,

5 Little  jumping on the 

You can point to the words or pictures as you read them. Children will gradually learn to read the posted words.

### **Visual Arts:**

- Painting with brushes or drawing with crayons helps perfect a child’s fine motor skills and more specifically his eye-hand coordination. These skills will be crucial for learning to write. Learning to use a tool like a paintbrush or crayon is a precursor to using a pencil.
- Children’s artwork is typically labeled with the child’s name. Initially write the child’s name on the artwork saying each letter as you write it. Often by doing this, the first word that a child learns to read is her name. This often leads to a child trying to later recreate the letters on her own.
- The children’s easel can become a science lab. Children at the easel may spend time seeing what happens when you put a little yellow paint in with the blue, for example. He intently watches what happens as he adds more and more yellow. Such experiential learning is the best!

These are just a few ideas to get started. Have fun thinking of other ways to teach academics through the arts.